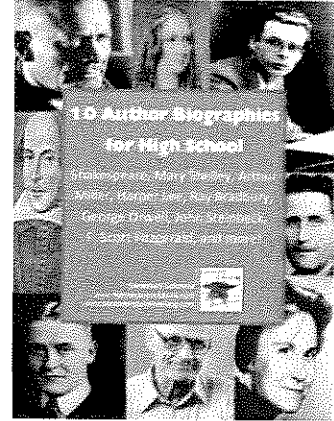


Attacking the Common Core Standards: Informational Texts-Part One

Posted on March 7, 2012 by SecondarySolutions

The Common Core State Standards are quickly becoming a reality for the vast majority of the country. Many teachers in the U.S. are being faced with the task of aligning teaching materials to the Common Core Standards beginning in the 2012-2013 school year, and while many teachers are just trying to make it through the end of this school year in one piece, most are beginning to feel the pressure to find and/or create practical, usable, and appropriate materials that meet the rigors of these new standards.



This article is the first in a series about how teachers can address the Common Core Standards and to align their materials to the rigors they are being faced with through the implementation of the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts. In this series, I will explore several options for addressing the Common Core Standards to help English Language Arts teachers like you to learn to seamlessly align your teaching materials to the Common Core.

Starting With Informational Texts

As I travel the country at teacher conferences, ELA teachers continually express their concern and stress over the thought of providing access to and teaching Informational Texts within the Common Core Standards. Many teachers are under the assumption that in order to “make way” for these Informational Texts, it is at the sacrifice of fiction—novels, plays, and poetry. Understandably, English teachers are appalled at the thought of forsaking fiction for a seemingly “unbalanced” emphasis on non-fiction. By nature, we love our literature—especially a great novel!

It is imperative that ELA teachers realize that it is NOT the English Language Arts teachers’ sole responsibility to address this aspect of the Common Core Standards. According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative’s [Myths versus Facts](#) section:

Myth: English teachers will be asked to teach science and social studies reading materials.

Fact: With the Common Core ELA Standards, English teachers will still teach their students literature as well as literary non-fiction. However, because college and career readiness overwhelmingly focuses on complex texts outside of literature, these standards also ensure students are being prepared to read, write, and research across the curriculum, including in history and science. These goals can be achieved by ensuring that teachers in other disciplines are also focusing on reading and writing to build knowledge within their subject areas.

Myth: The Standards don’t have enough emphasis on fiction/literature.

Fact: *The Standards require certain critical content for all students, including: classic myths and stories from around the world, America's Founding Documents, foundational American literature, and Shakespeare. Appropriately, the remaining crucial decisions about what content should be taught are left to state and local determination. In addition to content coverage, the Standards require that students systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking, and listening.*

In other words, it is not necessarily up to ONLY the ELA teacher to take on the rigorous task of providing and studying Informational Texts alone. Savvy and educated Principals and Department Heads should be aware that it is *not only* up to the ELA teacher to fulfill this task of providing and teaching informational texts. In fact, it is up to Social Studies/History, Science, and even Math teachers to provide and teach non-fictional literature according to each subject area. Similarly, all disciplines should be responsible for helping to improve literacy for all students.

Now that some of the pressure and fears may have been assuaged as you realize you should NOT be on your own teaching non-fictional "Informational" texts, let's look at some of the ways you *can* address this strand, and still keep the novels, plays, and poetry. You CAN have your cake, and eat it too.

One very simply, straightforward way (and we will focus on other ways in subsequent articles) to address the Informational Text aspect is to have students study biographies. If you are going to be reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*, why not read a biography on Harper Lee? If you are studying *The Crucible*, then you should have students learn about Arthur Miller. But this is just the tip of the iceberg as far as biographies are concerned. To use our example of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, why not have students do research on/read a biography of Homer Plessy (Plessy v. Ferguson), Truman Capote (Lee's neighbor upon whom the character Dill was based), or Emmett Till (killed at age 14 for allegedly flirting with a white woman). Even if the literature does not have a historical aspect, biographies can still be an option. For example, in the novel *When You Reach Me* by Rebecca Stead, the author mentions Dick Clark. The protagonist, Miranda, reads *A Wrinkle in Time*, which provides the opportunity for students to read a biography on *A Wrinkle in Time*'s author Madeleine L'Engle.

But simply reading the biographies may not be enough to fully address the standards of Informational Texts. Students should also be prompted to answer questions or complete an activity to analyze the intent and purpose of the biography. Some generic questions that can help you address these standards are:

What is the purpose of this text? How do you know?

What loaded or biased language do you notice?

If there is a good amount of loaded or biased language, what do you think is the author's purpose? If you cannot find any loaded or biased language, why do you think that is?

How is the information in this article arranged (cause/effect, chronological, order of importance, compare/contrast, etc.)?

What details/support can you find that indicates how this person's upbringing and education has ultimately affected his later life?

Briefly summarize the important milestones in this person's life, including dates.

Write an original one-sentence thesis based on the information in this article.

Write a list of 10 unknown, technical, or subject-specific words from the article; define each.

How does the use of these words affect your reading of the article?

While biographies are a simple way to keep students interested in a novel while still addressing the strand of Informational Text, they are effective, and can be a brief exercise that when added to your curriculum not only help to provide support for a novel, but can reassure you that you are taking steps to integrate those non-fictional standards. Additionally, by providing another medium (i.e. a video) on the person of interest and having students analyze the text in comparison to the video, you also address an additional aspect of these standards.

If you like the idea of integrating biographies into your curriculum, I have put together a collection of [Ten Author Biographies – Popular High School Authors](#) for \$7.99, available on TPT. I also have a smaller, FREE version simply called [Author Biographies](#).






Keep checking back for more ways to integrate Informational Texts in your curriculum and lesson creation!

Thanks for stopping by!

Kristen

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4 THOUGHTS ON "ATTACKING THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS: INFORMATIONAL TEXTS-PART ONE"

[Nathalie](#) on [March 7, 2012 at 6:56 pm](#) said:

GREAT post! I teach intensive reading, so informational text is a very important part of my curriculum; however, I think that this is a good reminder to me that I CAN and SHOULD mix traditional literature pieces with the informational stuff to give my students EXTRA help.

